

The Dormancy of Empowerment: An Analytical Study of Various Impediments to Women's Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan

Dr. Arab Naz¹

Umar Daraz²

Waseem Khan³

Mohammad Hussain⁴

Qaisar Khan⁵

Abstract

Education is a key to empower women, control their lives and a source to overcome the oppressive customs and traditions which are resisting their educational participation. The present study describes the socio-cultural, economic and religious impediments to women's education in Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. The data was collected from 320 respondents categorized in different segments with proportional allocation method of stratified random sampling technique using questionnaire as a tool of data collection. The data has been analyzed by applying Chi-square test, correlation technique and processed in the form of tables and bar-charts, while discussions have been made on the basis of findings and results. The results show that socio-cultural, economic, religious and political constraints exist in women's education, which has adversely affected the developmental process. The study suggests that proper policy making, implementation, availability of educational institutions etc. would promisingly increase women's education in Pakhtun society.

Key Words: *Women's education, Impediments, cultural obstacles, economic obstacles, religious and political barrier.*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is one of the biggest challenges to the nation since independence. Despite the various developmental plans and measures, the overall improvement in Pakistan's literacy rate since its independence (1947) is 45 percent (56.5 percent for males and 32.6 percent for females according to 1998 Census Report). This is alarming as compare to rest of the countries in the region. In comparison to the rapid population growth, however there seems to be a rise in the rate of literacy but population of the illiterate persons has more than doubled since 1951, while the same is tripled for females. According to Asian Development Bank Report (2000) about Pakistan, approximately 60 percent of the total population is illiterate and women constitute 60 percent of the illiterate population. The report further reveals that strong gender disparities exist in educational attainment between rural and urban areas and amongst the provinces. In 1996–1997 the literacy rate in urban areas was 58.3 percent while in rural areas it was 28.3 percent, only 12 percent among rural women. There are also considerable inequalities in literacy rates amongst the four provinces, especially disparities between men and women. Besides, there is no uniformity in education at the country level that causes uneven development in the ratio of female education.

No society has ever liberated itself economically, politically and socially without a sound base of educated women (Haq, 2000). Likewise GOP Report (2006) states that women's education is one of the most effective channels for reducing inequalities between men and women that ensures maximum participation of women in the developmental process. Similarly Behrman (1997), Alderman and King (1998) are of the opinion that females constitute half of the population and any investment in the development of human capital, ignoring female population can not be fruitful for the progress of the country. Women's education has a prime status in women's empowerment and societal development that has a significant role in flourishing human capital and economic growth (Chaudhary, 2010; Arif, 1999). Thus, the higher ratio of educated women increases the per capita income of a country, which may be a core factor in overall economic development of a nation (Stephan, 2002 and Klasen, 1999).

¹ Chairman, Department of Sociology/Social Work, University of Malakand KPK

² Lecturer and M. Phil Scholar Department of Sociology/Social Work, University of Malakand KPK

³ Lecturer and M. Phil Scholar Department of Sociology/Social Work, University of Malakand KPK

⁴ Lecturer, Department of Sociology/Social Work, University of Malakand KPK

⁵ Lecturer, Department of English, University of Malakand

In the developing countries like Pakistan, culture plays a dominant role both in deprivation and promotion of women's education. Being a depriving element; Hamid (1993) expresses that the socio-cultural norms of the rural society of Pakistan keep girls away from schools. Likewise, Khan and Ali (2005) attribute the low school enrolment in rural areas to the cultural and religious norms of the society. Similarly Latif (2009:03) expedites that Pakistan is a patriarchal society where women suffer many kinds of discrimination, resulting in low social, economic and political status. In relation to the socio-economic perspective; the cultural constraints to women's education and gender disparity in primary and secondary education may be attributed to the prevalence of the current poverty (Robinson-Pant, 2004).

Apart from the cultural factors; women's education in a patriarchic society is also impeded through numerous reasons. In addition, education is one of the greatest needs is to spread education among women, as a matter of fact there is room for the extension of education even among men (Sharma and Sharma, 2004). *Pakhtun* culture; being one of the patriarchic and oldest patterns of life having very less chances for women's mobility (Naz, 2010) not only creates hurdles to women's primary education but also impedes their overall development. In this context, the position of women in higher education is of high concern because access to education is an influential indicator of women's status in a given society (Verma, 2006). Women's education in Pakistan, its status and standard particularly is at the lowest level. Thousands of girls otherwise intelligent and capable enough to get education, but are deprived because of multifarious socio-cultural and economic reasons and gender prejudices unable to play active role in the development of society (Nayak and Nair, 2005). Education might encourage women's empowerment by increasing women's negotiating position within the domestic spheres and creates ability to make choices in the given options and act on them (Mishra, 2005).

Cross cultural studies show that education is one of the empowering tools that liberate women from various traditional and cultural obstacles. The contribution of an educated woman in the household might be high even if she is not working and earning. In addition, she enjoys comparatively high prestige in her husband's family, and other family members might come to her for advice and to Amin (1996) particularly her bargaining power might be especially enhanced with respect to her mother-in-law, who is likely to be uneducated. In this connection Jejeebhoy (1998) argues that women's education is an important tool for reducing violence against them, which enhances their ability. Besides, an educated woman can understand the activities of day to day life in a better way as compared to an illiterate woman and tend to positively affect the life probability of their children. It is education that enables and implicates women's social adjustment and makes her a companion and helping-mate of the husband (Sen, 1999, Kazi and Sattar 1996). Similarly, as argued by Hassan (2007) that through getting knowledge; a woman can better socialize her children in an elegant and loving way and Ram (2004) states that women's education often proves as an instrument of change and inculcates new values and ideas among people.

Education is an important instrument to reduce gender discrimination. With rise in the level of education, it is expected that individual would become conscious of their rights and thus protest against discriminatory practices (UNDP, 1998). Likewise Knowles et al, (2002) describes that female education reduces fertility, infant mortality and increase children education, it is one of the important factors to break the vicious circle of women's exploitation and bring positive change in their lives. Keeping in view the importance of education; women's education in country in general and particularly in *Pakhtun* society is run under the rules of traditionalism, old customs and dominant patriarchic values. There exists a huge gender gap with low literacy of female in the educational ladder. The socio-cultural environment and economic resources are mostly under the control of male population, which reduces female access to education, economic resources, political participation (Khan, 1993).

Similarly, at the policy level as Gulati (2006) expound that gender differences and inequality in education with policy favoring more men than women continued..... and besides, there is lack of infrastructural facilities i.e. inadequacy of schools, and improper infrastructural facilities, non-availability of transport etc were also responsible for reducing female educational ratio (Asghar, 1992, World Bank Report, 1997b, King, 1990, Bellew and King, 1993). In the tribal belt of *Pakhtun* society; girls' education dramatically lags behind boys' education, which is a challenge to the concerned policy makers. Such illiteracy in the region also indicates the hidden disparities at the country level where overall literacy rate in general is comparatively low.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The social and cultural context of *Pakhtun* society is predominantly patriarchal. Men and women are traditionally divided into two separate worlds that are masculine and feminine.

This division further defines the roles of both male and female and place women as a reproductive unit and restricts them to the role of a mother and wife within the domestic domain, while male as a productive and the controller of the household and public domain (Naz, 2009). The patriarchal social structure, long historic traditions, male dominancy and observance of *Purdah* negatively influences women's status in the context of education in *Pakhtun* society (Women in Pakistan Report, 2000). While analyzing *Pakhtun* social structure and its impacts on women's education Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) illuminate that in Pakistani rural areas women are laying at the pathetic stage in the context of their educational well-being in comparison to their male counterparts. *Pakhtun* culture assumes very low chances to women's education where they are traditionally confined to the four walls of home while men are regarded as the breadwinners. Thus parents usually prefer sending boys to schools and encourage them to put a significant amount of effort into their studies. These arguments show how traditional perception regarding the role of male and female in society, particularly in the rural and tribal areas; prevent girls from receiving adequate investment in their education (Hill and King, 1991).

The patriarchic structure of *Pakhtun* society assigns men the superior position in different spheres of life including familial and public. Parents prefer to invest more over males' education as if their old age social security is attached with better economic ability of their sons because sons in a traditional society usually shoulder the economic responsibility of the family (Pande and Astone, 2001). Besides, there is significant misperception regarding women's education that the investment in educating a girl will not benefit her parents once the girl gets married (Haq, 2000). Such kinds of misperception reduce the value of women's education and deprive them of their basic rights.

Apart from the prevalent misperception; other factors are also playing the key role to impede women's education as in *Pakhtun* society where women's honor is linked to their mobility while attainment of education requires external movement from the four walls, therefore, parents are often reluctant to allow their daughters to move away towards far-flung situated schools. Culturally, girls are expected to be isolated from strangers (males); in this context girls' visits to boarding schools in distant towns, distant schools locations, available facilities for female students and teachers, curriculum and examination policies are among the other school-related factors that can contribute to gender gaps. In addition, these are the factors, which influences parents' decisions; whether to educate their daughters or not and the importance of personal security of girls to protect them from sexual abuses dominate parents' decisions and to Khalid (1996) traveling long distance to attend schools usually pose threat to the personal security of girls.

The lower economic conditions of people in *Pakhtun* society also leads to resist women's education because it is difficult for the parents to afford the educational expenses of both male and female. In this regard Gaskel et al. (2004) elucidate that in developing countries, the private returns to girl's education are usually much lower than the returns to boys and resultantly more girls are likely squeezed out from school. Illuminating the above mentioned impediments; this research activity aims to bring the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious hurdles to the forefront that is persevering to restrict women from educational attainment. In addition, the intensity of these impediments in *Pakhtun* social structure is also assessed in regard to their adverse consequences. Furthermore, such impediments are embedded in *Pakhtun* social organization, which that results in declaring women as a second class citizen.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify and record the various socio-cultural impediments resisting women's education in *Pakhtun* society
2. To know and explore the major socio-economic constraints, which relegate women's education in *Pakhtun* society
3. To analyze religious misperception and political barriers hindering women's education in *Pakhtun* society.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. Socio-cultural impediments have a close association with women's education
2. Economic obstacles decrease women's education in *Pakhtun* society
3. Religious misperception and lack of political participation adversely affect women's education

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research activity aims to critically analyze the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political obstacles that exist in women's education in *Pakhtun* society of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* Pakistan.

The study empirically analyzes *Pakhtun* social structure, customs and traditions and *Pakhtun* code of life (*Pakhtunwali*), which in one way or the other resist women's education. This study was undertaken in Malakand Division *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* province of Pakistan. Due to the vast geography of Malakand Division and problem in access to people, the researchers surveyed three union councils of Tehsil Batkhela (the capital of District Malakand), which were coded for convenience as UC-L, UC-M, and UC-U (union council lower, middle and upper respectively). The total population of mentioned union councils is 156641 (District Survey Report, 2010) in which data was collected from 320 educated respondents selected from 2424 target population (educated females having graduation and above) using stratified random sampling (proportional allocation method) technique and questionnaire method for data collection while focusing on age group of 25 and above.

The data was analyzed both qualitatively (in the form of description) and quantitatively (in the form of tables, frequencies, percentages, graphs) with statistical application of chi-square test and correlation technique for validity of hypotheses and to explore and analyze the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Further, statistical analysis has been divided into three tables coded in the SPSS for quantitative measurement. The responses of respondents are recorded in two categories i.e. to some extent (TSE) and to greater extent (TGE), which are coded as 1 and 2. The current study has been approached through Gender and Development (GAD) perspective while focusing mainly on women's empowerment. The GAD stance has been carefully taken into consideration in terms of gender development and women's empowerment. In this regard, the faded position of women in the developmental projects raised by Parpart (2000:52) in the period of 1940s and 50s was considered as basic element of development. Similarly, the status of women in Third World countries as noted by Boserup's (1970), in *Women's Role in Economic Development* was analyzed for understanding of the various negative impacts of development programs on the status of Third World women.

Besides, stances have been taken from Alinsky Soul (1971), *Rules for Radicals* which deals with idea of women's power, and World Bank's discovery (in late 60s) of the "invisible woman", as the focus of production and women in development (WID) approach has also been incorporated. The study also looks into Western capitalism as a source of exploitation of Third World particularly, dependency Marxist including Frank (1969, 1979) and Amin (1974) who linked women's exploitation with the process of "Catching By" as performed by capitalist system. The researchers have also focused on WAD (Women and Development) as discussed by Parpart (1989) as to integrate women into the patriarchal world, and to create "women-only" projects, carefully constructed to protect women's interests from patriarchal domination and the Gender and Development (GAD) approach of the 1980s as an alternative to WID and WAD models as approached through Moser (1989), Molyneux (1985) and Haq (2000), which focuses on either of the needs of men including both practical and strategic gender needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The statistical analysis exemplify major portion of respondents in the form of frequencies and percentages. The quantitative analysis further elucidates the significance of results in context of chi-square test, correlation technique, tables, and charts, showing the level of socio-cultural barriers. The data statistically illustrates that socio-cultural constraints have adversely affected women's education. The socio-cultural barriers in women's education exist to some extent (TSE) are favored by few of the respondents (23%) and to high extent (TGE) are marginalized by majority of the respondents (77%) who evidently enumerate that cultural impediments' like, patriarchy and male dominancy contributed (24%:76%) in decreasing women's education. Customary laws, which do not allow women to go outside the home attributed in women's education (23%:77%). *Pakhtun* codes of life such as *Haya*, *Nang*, *Ghairat etc* molding the results likewise (29%:71%) , Similarly gender bias social structure, which ignores women in the context of education resulted (08%:92%), feudalistic nature of society where priority is given to the traditions and values that oppose women's education (23%:77%), negative perception regarding *Purdah* and veiling add (22%:78%) and male control over decision making process, the decision in the context of education are in the hand of male members, which ignore women and contributed to women's illiteracy as (18%:82%) and (23%:77%) respectively (See Table-I).

TABLE-I SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Socio-Cultural Constraints	Women’s Education		Total
	To Low Extent	To Greater Extent	
Patriarchy and male dominancy	20	63	83
Customary laws	11	36	47
<i>Pakhtun</i> code of life	18	45	63
Gender bias social structure	01	11	12
Feudalistic nature of society	03	10	13
Negative perception regarding <i>Purdah</i>	10	36	46
Male control over decision making	10	46	56
Total	73	247	320

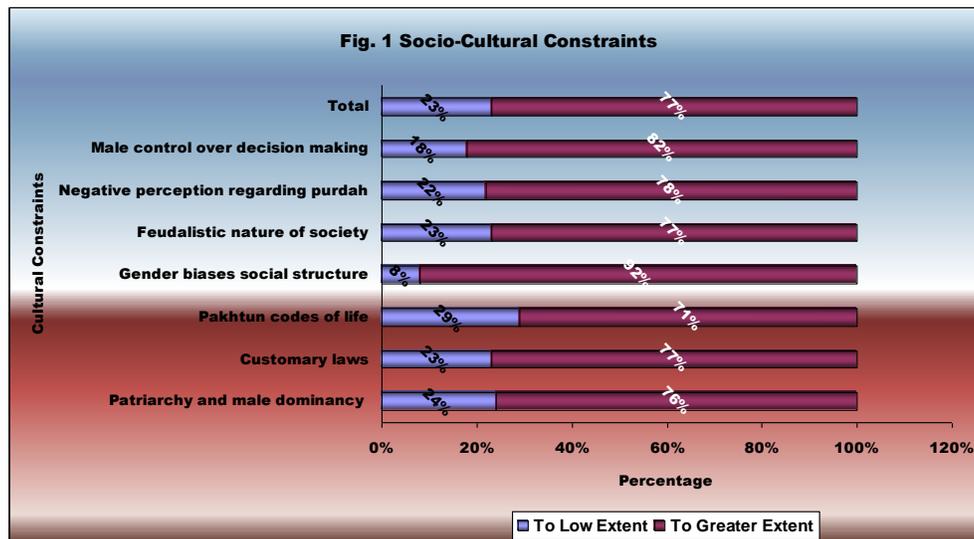
($P=.000^{**} < .05$ there is highly significant relationship between socio-cultural constraints in women’s education, ($\chi^2 = 3.514$, D.f. =6)

CORRELATION

		Women’s Education	Socio-Cultural Constraints
Women’s Education	Pearson Correlation	1	0.956**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	320	320
Socio-Cultural Constraints	Pearson Correlation	.0956**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	320	320

(**Correlation is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = 0.956$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.91$)
 (Since 91% of the variance is shared, the association is obviously a strong one)

Resultantly, the socio-cultural impediments to women’s education as proposed in the hypothesis “Socio-cultural impediments have a close association with women’s education” which has been judged by applying chi-square test where the value of $P=.000^{**} < .05$, shows that the result is highly significant and there is a strong association between cultural impediments in the context of decrease in women’s education. Further the correlation technique validates the result in a manner that (**Correlation is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = .0956$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.91$, since 91% of the variance is shared, the association is obviously a strong one), which conclude that cultural obstacles are threat to women’s education (see Figure. 1).



The collected information shows the alliance between economic obstacles in women’s education. It has been further elucidated by the results that economic obstacles reduce women’s education in *Pakhtun* society; although

there is a convincing variation in the sense that the obstacles are to some extent (TSE) marked by few likewise (26%) while these are to greater extent (TGE) marked by majority (74%). The quantitative analysis explicitly demonstrates that among the economic obstacles (40%:60%) respondents enumerated that poverty is one of the potential barrier to women’s education because people in the area cannot afford education of both their male and female children. The analysis obviously illustrates that the indicators like unemployment contributed in women’s illiteracy likewise (23%:77%). Illiteracy in the area is also prevalent at a high level even male’s education in the area is not satisfactory and add (19%:81%) to women’s illiteracy, female economic dependency (25%:75%), female restricted mobility (29%:71%) low salary (13%:87%) and unpaid labor (15%:85%) resist women’s education in *Pakhtun* society (See Table-II).

TABLE-II ECONOMIC OBSTACLES IN WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Economic Obstacles	Women’s Education		Total
	To Low Extent	To Greater Extent	
Poverty	20	30	50
Unemployment	10	34	44
Illiteracy	10	45	55
Female Economic dependency	17	51	68
Female restricted mobility	22	53	75
Low salary	02	13	15
Unpaid labor	02	11	13
Total	83	237	320

($P=.002 < .05$ there is only significance relationship between economic obstacles in women’s education ($\chi^2 = 12.61, D.f. =6$)

CORRELATION

		Women’s Education	Socio-Economic Constraints
Women’s Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.856*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	320	320
Socio-Economic Constraints	Pearson Correlation	.856*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	320	320

(*Correlation is only significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = .856^*$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.73$)
(Since 73% of the variance is shared, the association is obviously a strong one)

Consequently, the statistical results express the relationship between independent and dependant variables. This is stated in the hypothesis i.e. “Economic obstacles decrease women’s education in *Pakhtun* society”. The chi square test was applied to test the hypothesis, the value of ($P=.002 < .05$, chi-square value, 12.61, with D.f.=6), shows that the result is only significant. Therefore it is concluded that socio-economic obstacles reduces women’s education. Further the correlation analysis authenticate the results and describes as (*Correlation is only significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = .856$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.73$, since 73% of the variance is shared, the association is obviously a strong one), which conclude that cultural obstacles are threat to women’s education (see Figure. 2).

The data shows a significant correlation among the religious and political barriers to women’s education. The statistical analysis elucidates that the response of the respondent was recorded on two point categories i.e. to some extent (TSE) and to greater extent (TSG), which is accordingly as (32%: 68%). The quantitative analysis further demonstrate that religious misperception (45%:55%), increase in women’s illiteracy, lack of religious knowledge (45%:55%), lack of trained religious scholars (31%:69%) negatively propagate women’s education in their religious sermons and gatherings. Further the analysis highlight that religious misinterpretation (46%:54%), political instability (27%:73%), discrimination in policies (13%:87%) and lack of women’s representation in political affairs (12%:88%) chronologically affect women’s education (See Table-III).

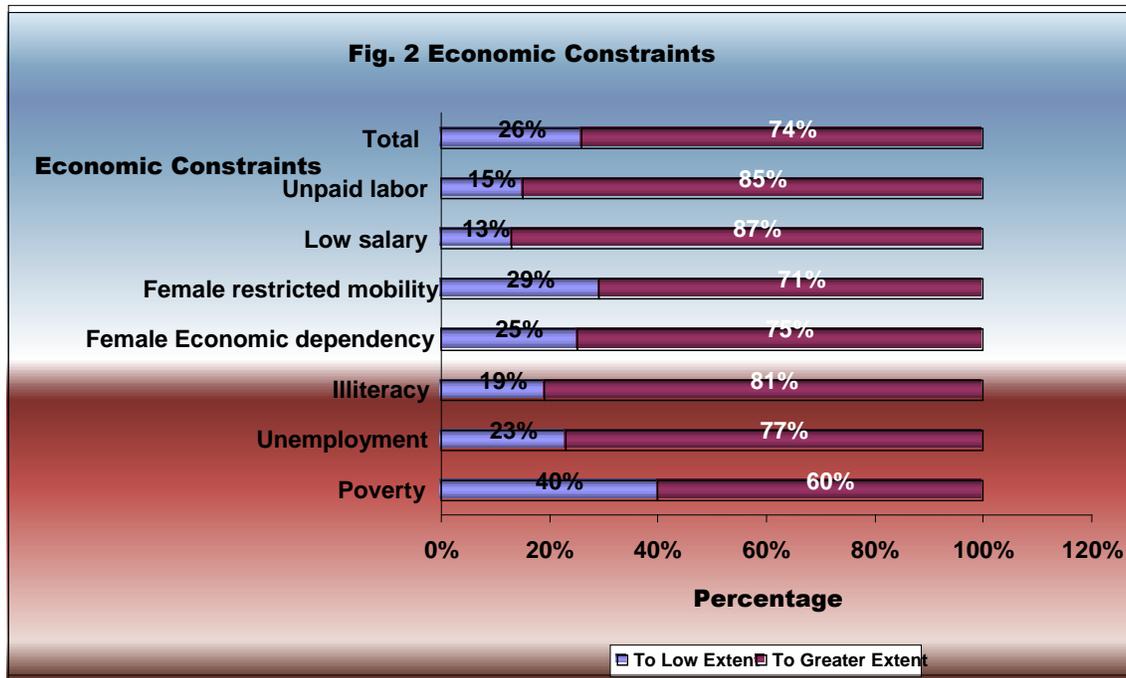


TABLE-III RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Religious and Political Constraints	Women’s Education		Total
	To Low Extent	To Greater Extent	
Religious misperception	30	36	66
Lack of religious knowledge	05	06	11
Lack of trained religious scholars	25	55	80
Religious misinterpretation	28	33	61
Political instability	04	11	15
Discrimination in policies	05	39	44
Lack of women representation in political affairs	05	38	43
Total	102	218	320

($P=.004 < .05$ there is a significant relationship between religious and political constraints and women’s education, ($\chi^2 = 20.9192$, D.f. =6)

CORRELATION

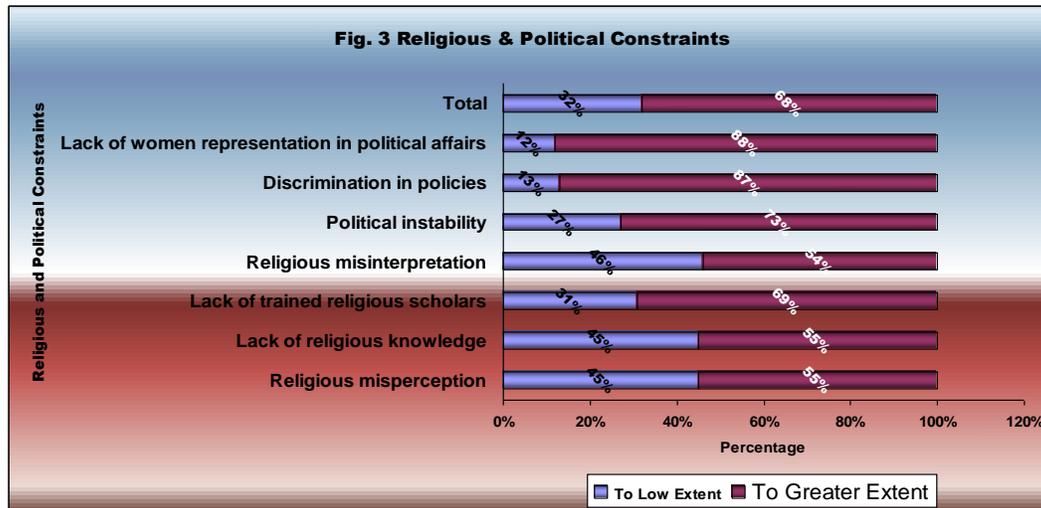
		Women’s Education	Religious and Political Constraints
Women’s Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.162**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	320	320
Religious and Political Constraints	Pearson Correlation	.162**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	320	320

(* Correlation is only significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = .842^*$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.71$)

(Since 71% of the variance is shared, the association is obviously a strong one)

The chi-square test and correlation technique were used to check the validity of hypothesis. The result of chi-square demonstrates that there is significant relationship among religious and political barriers and women’s education, which is statistically coded as ($p=.004 < .05$, $\chi^2 = 20.9192$, D.f. =6).

The correlation further validates the alliance of religious and political barriers in the context of women’s education in a compiled numerical form as (*Correlation is only significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $r(320) = .842$; $p < .01$. $r^2 = 0.71$, since 71% of the variance is shared, the association is notably a strong one) (see figure.3). So it has been concluded that the hypothesis “Religious misperception and lack of political participation adversely affect women’s education” was proved as authentic (See Figure-3).



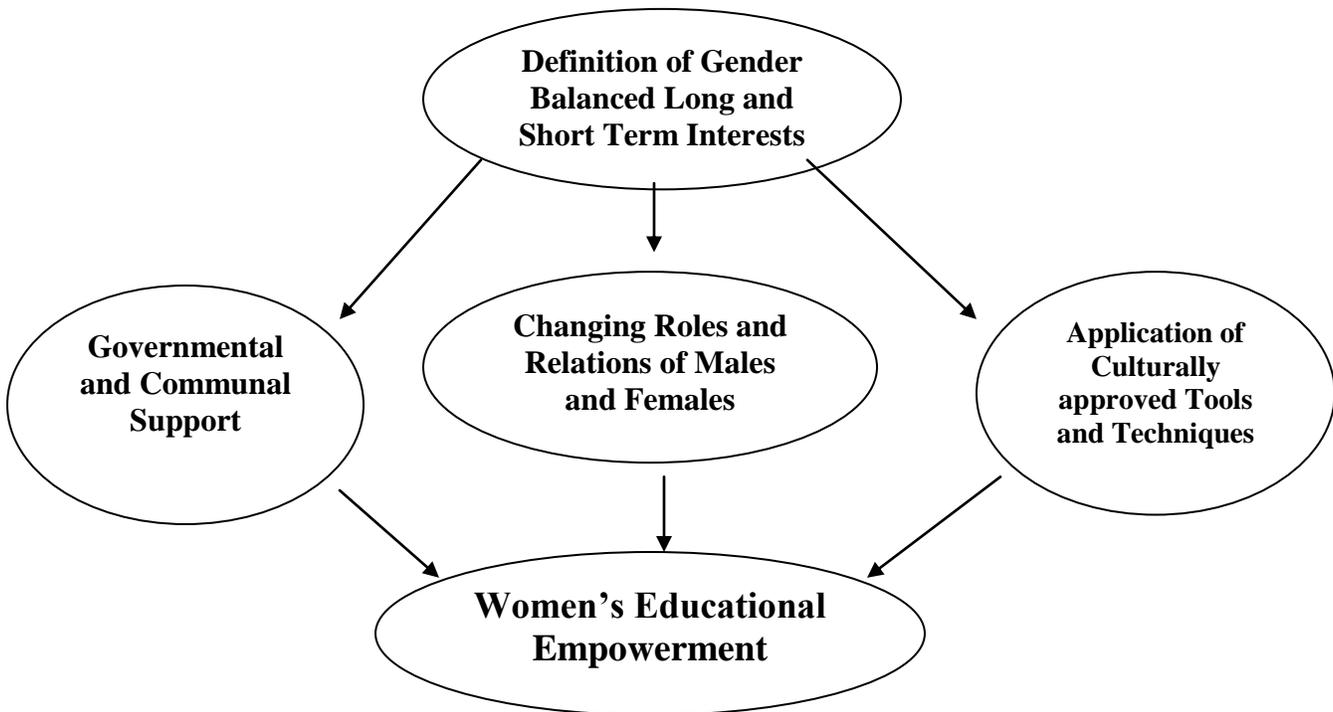
CONCLUSION

Women; being half of the overall population, are necessitated to spend miserable and dis-privileged life. The fact is evident that women are impeded over each and every step during the course of their domestic life, professional engagements, marital obligations and predominantly their educational spectrum. The social structure of the area explicitly denotes the hold of centuries old customs, traditions and norms that are playing the role of mercenary to block women’s educational status. This study palpably concludes that the custom of patriarchy and male dominancy is a deeply rooted phenomenon in the research area that is impeding women’s education. In assistance to such obstacles; the feudalistic nature of the area as well as the negative perception and over-strict practice of *Purdah* have a key role to block women from attaining education where male have the overall control of decision-making regarding women’s fate. Individual statuses are defined through their economic statuses, where economy highlights the person’s potentials and efficiency as well as his/her dominancy. *Pakhtun* culture very scarcely frees women to involve in matters related to economy where men are regarded as the bread winners while women are kept inside the four walls. In such a run; the intensity of poverty and excessive unemployed status of the inhabitants have restricted women to get education. Women are mostly found dependant over men in the course of their income and economic needs where men are resulted as conservative in matters concerning women’s education while women have restricted mobility to earn their daily needs and live an independent life. In addition, women in *Pakhtun* settled areas have the status of unpaid labor; their works and contributions are taken for granted and have an abated status, which results in women’s low education.

Women being a vulnerable segment in *Pakhtun* society are deprived and neglected in each and every sphere of life. Besides their abhorred status in the context social and economic well-being; the conservatism of the area has also bounded and misinterpreted religion. The cultural propagation of religion has severely damaged women’s educational status where the untrained and stubborn Mullahs have a role of corner stone. In addition, the governmental policies are also in opposition to women where the gender-blind and gender-biased policies have been implemented. Such a gap in policies has led to scarcity of educational institutions for women; lack of women teachers as well as the establishment of schools in far-flung areas has caused women’s apathy in education. In-short, the overall research activity concludes that women’s education has become an unfulfilled dream in the research area. Such a nightmare of women’s education is the outcome of distant past manly interpreted norms and values, which ultimately impede women to have an educated and sophisticated status. In the nutshell, the study concludes that definition of the long and short term interests in alliance with governmental support and mass media will obviously alter the gender relations both in family and at public level. In addition, through the application of culturally relative tools and techniques the gender development and women’s empowerment may be ensured in *Pakhtun* society.

The congregation of these steps will ultimately lead to women's capacity building, ownership in property, participation in decision-making, security of life as well as social and political awareness. The overall research activity in terms of women's education has been symbolized in the following model:

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL IN RELATION TO PAKHTUN SOCIETY UNDER STUDY



SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers have extended certain suggestions for resolution of the problem in shape of altering women's illiterate status to an educated-being. Area of the study is dominated by patriarchy, male dominance and centuries old traditions that tend to intensify all the other constraints. Gender equal socialization, equal facilitation and access to mass media needs encouragement to reduce hold of conservative thinking that would ultimately bring gender balanced flexibility in *Pakhtun* code of life (culture). The educational level of the area in general and that of women in particular is very low that has been mainly restricted by general mass poverty, which needs to be alleviated through lucrative projects while employing the masses to earn daily needs. Religious dogmas and its misinterpretation in terms of women's education increase gender gap and provide maximum hold to male over socio-economic and political resources. Through religious speeches, lectures and seminars; awareness regarding women's education shall be propagated in a way to change the mental horizon of male. The role of government in terms of policies and programs is very passive in respect of women's empowerment. Further, the hold of pressure groups and local politicians also has no such idea of women's empowerment. The role of government is pivotal and it shall take other organizations, responsible person of the community and the common people in confidence to introduce gender balanced policies and initiate programs to provide equal opportunities to women in education. Besides, a need to establish separate educational institutions and provision of transport shall be highly lucrative for enhancement of women's educational output.

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